**S. Sudan army repulsed SAF from Kuek, says in control of Heglig**

**By Sudan Tribune**

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South Sudan on Sunday said its army (SPLA) repulsed an attack by the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) on Kuek in Upper Nile state, and denied reports claiming that SAF have entered Heglig.

“We are surprised at the Sudan People’s Liberation Army command when we read and hear from Sudanese media reports that Sudanese Armed Forces have entered Panthou [“Helglig” in the Dinka language]. This is a hoax concocted by the government in Khartoum to mislead Sudanese public”, Philip Aguer, spokesman for the SPLA told journalists at a news conference on Sunday.

Aguer said SPLA forces on the ground are in control of Heglig and that the SPLA commander in the area is now “sitting on the same chair which used to be for the commander of the the SAF” in Heglig.

Aguer described the recent alleged attack on Kuek in Upper Nile state as an attempt by Khartoum to “divert [the] attention” of the SPLA from the Heglig conflict. He claimed SAF attacked a police stattion in Kuek at 6.30am on Sunday and were quickly repulsed by SPLA forces. The SPLA were under strict orders not to pursue the fleeing SAF.

Deputy head of the South Sudan Liberation Army/Movement (SSLA/M) rebels, Banpiny Monytuil, told Sudan Tribune on Sunday that the attack on Gaba, also in north-eastern Unity state was carried out by the South Sudan Democratic Army (SSDA) rebels. In March the SSLA/M forewarned of an attack in Upper Nile with the combined forces of the SSLA and SSDA.

Bapiny said SAF was not involved in the attack.

Bapiny also claimed that the SSDA are fighting in the east of the state and the SSLA will begin in the west and travel eastwards unitl the two forces combine for an attack on the state capital, Malakal.

Philip Aguer, the SPLA spokesman, accused SAF of attacking Kuek in order to draw the SPLA’s focus from Heglig.

He also said the SPLA forces had advanced by more than 40km from Heglig and captured a number of villages previously occupied by SAF inside South Sudan towards the 1956 borders.

Aguer claimed SAF had made “numerous attempts” to advance on the town, as well as Western Bahr el Ghazal.

He said that Khartoum’s aggression is motivated by an intention to “annex resource-rich areas inside the the territory of the Republic of South Sudan”. He claimed that this is an ongoing process which began in 2009 with in Western Bahr el Ghazal and Karsana in Unity state.

19 SPLA soldiers were killed and 32 injured in the attack which led to the taking of Heglig according to Aguer. He also claimed more the 240 SAF soldiers were killed and 14 captured. They were flown to Juba on Sunday.

Speaking at the same briefing, minister of information and broadcasting, Barnaba Marial Benjamin said Juba remains open to dialogue with Khartoum and that the president of South Sudan, Salva Kiir, remains ready to welcome president Bashir to Juba for talks. The talks scheduled to take place in Juba were postponed when relations deteriorated into the current state of conflict.

Marial reiterated claims that SAF is targeting civilians in its bombing campaigns, claiming SAF bombed Abiemnom county in Unity state on Saturday.

“We have come to the negotiating table to resolve all these issues amicably”, Marial said.

South Sudan’s vice president, Riek Machar, who is currently in Bentiu town, the capital of the oil producing Unity state near where the fighting takes place, on Sunday denied the claims by Khartoum, saying SAF had not approached Heglig on the ground since it was captured by the SPLA on Tuesday.

SAF had carried out massive mobilisation broadcast by Sudan’s state TV and vowed to retake Heglig from the SPLA on Friday.

Machar said the latest attempt by SAF to retake the town was repulsed to 30km from the town. He described South Sudan as “the victim” of aggression from Khartoum.

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